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tory of Ireland, than those in Drogheda and its immediate vicinity : they are rapidly falling into decay ; some through the ravages of time, but by far the greater number, it is much to be lamented, from carelessness and neglect ; nor have there been wanting instances, where the proudest of our castles and monastic ruins have been despoiled, that the materials might be employed in the construction of works, for which stones might be obtained at less expense from a neighbouring quarry.

The zeal of the first reformers (which in many instances was not tempered with much discretion) has also done much towards their destruction. Some of the ruins in this town bear evident marks of fire, nor do we want reformers at present who are equally willing to remove what they are pleased to consider *nuisances*, witness the late demolition of the ancient palace of the archbishops of Armagh, at Termonfecken, (because, forsooth, part of it fell and killed a cow !) a spot hallowed by the residence of some of the wisest and holiest men of their day, and which should be particularly consecrated as that in which the great USHER compiled his celebrated Chronology ; an event which should have caused the most trifling circumstance or place connected with him to be held sacred.

From the causes above-mentioned, it is not unusual to perceive in this town, the remains of abbeys and monasteries once dedicated to the service of the Deity, and palaces heretofore the residences of the most powerful men of past ages, now converted into stables, warehouses, &c., and next, to meet with the armorial bearings of the proudest families, and the sculptured ornaments, and stone utensils of what were once the sanctuaries of religion, now appropriated to the most servile and ignoble purposes.

"Amor Patriæ," or Love of Country, is a principle inherent in the breast of every man, in a greater or lesser degree ; a spark of this has prompted a desire to endeavour to rescue from total oblivion the few remaining monuments of the ancient grandeur and importance of my native town, by attempting a few sketches and descriptions of some of the most remarkable, which if you deem of sufficient merit to occasionally occupy a column of your truly national journal, are at your service. Perhaps the attempt may stir up the dormant faculties of others, and create a spirit of emulation in other quarters, which may bring to light many interesting facts and documents connected with, and illustrative of, our national history and antiquities.

It may perhaps be objected that these "Sketches," &c. possess but a local importance, but by a reference to the History of "Our Father-land," it will appear that at or near Drogheda, Milesius and his followers first landed in Ireland after a hard contested struggle, in which his son, Coalpa, was either killed or drowned. Coalpa was buried near the spot where he fell, and his memory is still preserved, by his having given name to the parish of Coelp. We also find, that Drogheda was in the year 911 fortified by, and became the strong hold of Turgesius, the Dane, from which he frequently sallied, and laid waste the surrounding country. At Duleek, in the vicinity, was erected the first stone church in Ireland. Here St. Patrick it is said founded a monastery, since called the Abbey of St. Mary de Urse.

Here we also find the sovereignty of Ireland surrendered to King Richard II. by four Irish kings doing homage and fealty in the Church of Saint Mary Magdalene, in the year 1395 : we find also the residence of all the archbishops of Armagh, from the days of St. Patrick until those of primate Robinson, in the close of the 18th century. Here many of the English viceroys kept their courts and held parliaments ; and here was passed the famous law called "Poynning's Law," which made the Irish parliament entirely dependent on that of England, and its edicts of no effect until ratified by the English monarch. In 1641, the progress of the northern Irish, under Owen Roe O'Neill, was stopped by the resolute defence of the garrison of Drogheda ; and in 1649, Cromwell here consummated an act of the most inhuman barbarity, by the slaughter of the garrison and inhabitants for their adherence to King Charles I.

Last, not least, in 1690, Drogheda resisted the attack of a division of king William's army ; and within two

miles of its walls was fought the famous "Battle of the Boyne," which decided the fate of the British empire.

After this recapitulation, I think it will be admitted that Drogheda possesses something more than a local importance ; and that, as I before remarked, its history is intimately blended with the ancient ecclesiastic and military history of Ireland.

I now furnish a view and description of "Magdalene's Steeple," a building which has braved the storms of above six centuries, hoping it may prove acceptable.

R. A.

MAGDALENE'S STEEPLE,

OR REMAINS OF THE DOMINICAN CONVENT.

In the north part of Drogheda, near Sunday Gate, and immediately adjoining the site of the ancient Town-wall, stand the remains of the Dominican Convent, under the invocation of St. Mary Magdalene, called also, the Abbey of Preaching Friars. It was founded A.D. 1224, by Lucas de Netterville, Archbishop of Armagh—was suppressed at the general dissolution in 1541, and is now the property of a branch of the Leigh family.

The original building, (if we may form an opinion by what remains,) appears to have been of considerable extent and magnificence ; the tower, which is the only part remaining, is a lofty square structure, of light and elegant proportions, built upon, and entirely supported by a noble pointed gothic arch, the buttresses of which from their apparent slowness appear scarcely sufficient to support the superincumbent weight : this circumstance, with its present isolated state, give the tower a most singular and commanding appearance : it contains two apartments above the arch, the intervening floor being arched and groined from the angles—the groins supported by cherubs' heads, well carved in stone ; the walls are perforated by eight windows, two on each side, with cut stone casings, mullions and transoms, neatly finished and ornamented ; a spiral stone staircase is connected with the outside of the building, the entrance to which is at a considerable distance from the ground ; the masonry is remarkably firm, and in fine preservation, scarcely a stone being removed by the effects of time, although braving the storms of above six hundred years ; there is, indeed, a breach in the upper part of the east side, and the mullions of one window are removed, but this is supposed to have been effected by Cromwell's cannon, in 1649, to compel the surrender of a part of the garrison who had taken refuge in it.

The church appears to have been cruciform, the tower arising from the centre ; but the body of the building, and every other appendage, has been long destroyed, and that so effectually, that not even the foundations can be traced : it is probable this took place immediately after the dissolution, as we find that in 1570, the ancient monument of Richard Strongbow, earl of Chepstow, being broken to pieces by the fall of the roof of Christ Church, Dublin, Sir Henry Sidney, lord deputy, directed a monument of Thomas, earl of Desmond, then in this church, should be removed and placed instead of it, which was accordingly done : it is not probable this would have occurred if the place had not been previously desecrated ; and in the most ancient paintings of Drogheda extant, particularly one in the hall of Beaulieu House, representing the siege in 1641, the tower is represented in its present isolated state, with the exception of some turrets or towers on the Town-wall, which formed the northern boundary of the church-yard, but of these turrets or wall there are not at present any remains.

The area which the church and its dependencies formerly occupied, has been parcelled into a number of small tenements, consisting of cottages with gardens attached ; over these the lofty tower rears its venerable head, and from its magnitude, and air of solemn grandeur, forms a striking contrast with the hovels which at present surround it. "MAGDALENE'S STEEPLE," as it is now called, and the tower and spire of St. Peter's, of modern architecture, in the immediate vicinity, both being situated on the highest part of the ground on which Drogheda is built, form a very conspicuous and imposing object in the approach to the town in any direction.

There are some remarkable circumstances connected with this convent related in history, a few of which are transcribed in the order of time in which they occurred.

On the 10th of March, 1395, four Irish kings, viz.—O'Neill, O'Hanlon, O'Donnell, and Mac Mahon, with several other petty chieftains of Ulster, made their personal submission to King Richard II., in this church, the manner of which is thus related by Sir James Ware, in his *Antiquities of Ireland*. "Every one of them, before the words of submission, laid aside his cap, belt, and skeyne, and kneeling down before the king, put both his hands joined between the king's hands, and repeated the words of fealty and submission in the Latin language. These kings, after this ceremony, were committed to the care of Henry Carlile, an Englishman, who understanding the Irish language, was commanded to instruct them in the English customs, particularly in that of receiving the order of knighthood, who so wrought on them that he prevailed on them to accept it, although they alleged they had received it from their fathers at the age of seven years. These kings being more fully instructed by the earl of Ormonde, by the king's command, were habited according to their dignity, and having performed their vigils, and heard a mass, were solemnly made knights by the king's own hand, in the Cathedral Church of Dublin."

The MS. annals of Ireland, in St. Sepulchre's Library, Dublin, relate that in 1412, great dissensions subsisted between the two sides of Drogheda, divided, by the River Boyne, which were often attended with bloodshed, mutilation, and loss of life on both sides. Father Philip Bennett, master of divinity, and a friar of St. Mary Magdalen's Convent, invited the people of both parties to hear his sermon in the Collegiate Church of St. Peter, on the festival of "Corpus Christi," that he assumed for his theme these words of cxxxiii. Psalm, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity;" that in the sermon having thrice asked the congregation with energy, "will ye be united together in the body of Christ?" Alderman William Symcock answered, in the name of all, "we will;" that when the sermon was ended, they were profusely entertained in the refectory of this convent; and, having there and then consulted with Father Bennett upon their disputes, by his advice a joint petition was made to King Henry VI., signed by Nicholas Flenmyng, Archbishop of Armagh, which they sent to London by one Robert Ball, who returned to Drogheda on the 15th of December in the same year, with a charter from the king, uniting the two sides into one Town of Drogheda, and under one mayor, and forming it into a special county; that the following day the archbishop gave his blessing to the people of the county and town thus coalesced; and that the first mayor of the town so incorporated was the said William Symcock. It appears from a charter given in the fifth year of Edward IV. (1365) for founding an university in Drogheda, that there was a corporation established here prior to the one just mentioned, and, it is probable, that the inhabitants of each side of the town, claiming the right of electing the mayor and other officers, the confusion and bloodshed referred to above, occurred at contested elections.

Some memorial of this feud and reconciliation is preserved here, by an annual burlesque or mummary, still exhibited on Shrove Tuesday, by the lower order of the inhabitants. "The mayor of Flea-lane," (an obscure lane in the suburbs behind Millmount) crossing the bridge, enters the northern part of the town, mounted on an ass, in mock procession, attended by his sheriffs, bailiffs, and other officers, all fantastically dressed with straw, and each bearing the insignia of his dignity, together with several ragamuffins disguised in petticoats and masks, and armed with blown bladders tied on poles, who clear the way, and enforce the passengers and lookers-on to treat "his worship" with proper respect; the cavalcade is preceded by a "bough," or garland, and music; in this way they parade the principal streets of the town levying contributions: at the same time another party enters the town by Laurence's-gate, consisting of "the mayor of the chord" and his followers, who are generally dressed in cast-soldier's clothes, perambulate the town in another direction until evening, or they conceive they have enough

collected, when they meet, and after a mock encounter between the "bladder men," to the great amusement of children and idlers, they all adjourn to the "chord field," outside Laurence's-gate, and spend the evening in mirth and jollity.

On the 15th of February, 1467, Thomas, Earl of Desmond, was beheaded on the North Commons (Hardman's garden), Drogheda, by command of John Tiptoft, earl of Worcester, lord deputy of Ireland, for exacting coyne and livery; his head was sent to Dublin and spiked on the castle, and his body interred in this church, and a stately monument erected to him, ornamented with his effigies in stone. This statue is now in Christ's Church, Dublin, in place of Strongbow's, being removed as before mentioned in 1570. R. A.

Our ingenious correspondent is in error in this and in his former statement relative to Strongbow's tomb, as we shall shew in a future number. It is but fair however to acknowledge that he has the authority of Archdall to support him.—Ed.

NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY.

No. 2.

JAMES USHER,
Archbishop of Armagh.

James Usher, designated by Dr. Johnson as the great luminary of the Irish Church, was born in the parish of St. Nicholas, Dublin, on the 4th of January, 1580. The family name was originally Nevil, but an ancestor who came into this kingdom with King John, in the quality of Usher of the Chamber, followed the common custom of the times, in exchanging the English name for that of the office with which he was invested. His father, Arnold Usher, was one of the Six Clerks in Chancery, and was, says Ware, "a person in good esteem for his integrity and prudence." By his mother, he was connected with the Stanihursts; and to his uncle, Richard, equally celebrated as an historian, philosopher, and poet, he was much indebted for the extensive knowledge he possessed of the antiquities and history of his country. The principles of that religion, to which he was so soon to dedicate the powers of his mind, were early inculcated by his aunts, who although blind from their cradle, were yet from the retentiveness of their memory enabled to repeat with accuracy the chief portions of the Bible. At eight years of age he was sent to a grammar school in Dublin, then kept by two Scotchmen, James Fullerton and James Hamilton, who ostensibly fulfilling the duties of teachers, were in reality engaged in maintaining a correspondence to secure the peaceable succession of James, on the death of Elizabeth. The attention of the master was early repaid by the proficiency of the pupil; and in 1593, the year in which the College of Dublin was finished, he was one of the first students who were admitted, and placed again under the care of Hamilton, then advanced to the dignity of "Senior Fellow." At this period he conceived the somewhat chimerical idea of making himself master of the histories of all nations; a study which he pursued with all the energy of an active and determined mind; and at from fourteen to sixteen he compiled a series of Synoptical Historical Tables, little differing from his *Annals*, which have since been published. The powers of his mind were not, however, limited to this sphere, but were extended equally to the study of philosophy and language; and after enriching himself with the literature of Greece and Rome, he applied himself to the tortuous mysteries of polemical divinity.

The result of this may be readily conceived; he who is prepared to argue, seeks with avidity for the opportunity of display; and in 1599, in his 19th year, we accordingly find him challenging and entering the lists of Theological disputation with the learned Jesuit Fitzsimons, then a prisoner in Dublin Castle. The fame that he acquired by this, and the consideration due to his extraordinary acquirements, speedily obtained him the attention of his countrymen, and the patronage of the Crown. He was ordained a deacon and priest, though under canonical age, through a special dispensation, by his uncle, Henry Usher, Archbishop of Armagh. To this were added the appointments of afternoon lecturer at Christ-Church; proctor, and catechetical lecturer of the University; of